

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

Publication No. 157140

ISSN 0012-2874

A magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers

Vol. 54, No. 5

October 1985

Whole No. 575

Literary Life Of Edward S. Ellis

By Denis R. Rogers



DIME NOVEL SKETCHES NO. 215

ADVENTURE LIBRARY

Publisher: Street & Smith, 79 Seventh Ave., New York, N. Y. Issues: 181. Dates: January 1925 to December 1931. Schedule: Bi-weekly. Size: 6 4/5 x 4 3/4". Pages: 250 to 300. Price: 15c. Illustration: Pictorial colored cover. Contents: Reprint of adventure stories that had appeared in earlier Street & Smith publications such as New Fiction Library, New Medal Library, New Romance Library and Eagle Library. Note: Beginning with No. 117 all were reprints of earlier numbers.

Literary Life Of Edward S. Ellis

By Denis R. Rogers

Edward Sylvester Ellis was born at Geneva, Ashtabula County, Ohio on April 11, 1840. We know little about his childhood, but the references to himself in such works as **TALES TOLD OUT OF SCHOOL** suggest a normal, healthy and mischievous boyhood. He graduated from New Jersey Normal School at Trenton about 1860 and thereafter was self-educated. It is likely that, if he had had the advantage of a good college training, Ellis would have gone far in politics or industry. His lack of familiarity with higher mathematics and the natural sciences restricted the scope to which he could apply a keen analytical mind.

He became a school teacher in Red Bank, N. J. but supplemented his income by writing stories and poetry. His first known published work is a poem, **THE WANDERER** which appeared in the September 1857 issue of **BALLOU'S DOLLAR MONTHLY**. His first major published work was the serial, **DICK FLINTON; OR, LIFE ON THE BORDER**, which Amos J. Williamson serialized in **THE NEW YORK DISPATCH**, beginning March 5, 1859. However it was the phenomenal success of **SETH JONES** which encouraged Ellis to take up writing seriously. He gave up teaching in 1874 to become a full-time writer.

It seems likely that the success of Ellis' early dime novels enabled him to marry at twenty-two. His bride was Annie Maria Deane (1843 or 1844 to March 1903). The wedding took place on December 25, 1862. There were four children from the union.

Harry Deane, Ellis' brother-in-law, was a professional ball player for the Cincinnati club in his young manhood. Ellis must have learned the finer points of the game from Harry Deane. Baseball games were a favorite plot feature with Ellis, who became the first president of the "regular" Trenton baseball club organized in 1876. Ellis was a keen follower of baseball.

Other relatives who provided expert background information for Ellis' books were George Smith, another brother-in-law who was a skillful contracting carpenter, and George Ellis, his brother, who served as an engineer in the Federal Navy during the Civil War and afterwards became a locomotive engineer on the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Between 1860 and 1865 Ellis wrote fifteen dime novels and five biographies for Beadle & Co. He also edited for that firm fifty sketches published in twelve numbers as **THE DIME TALES, TRADITION & ROMANCE OF BORDER & REVOLUTIONARY TIMES**. A number of these first dime novels were reprinted in Norwegian, French, German, Dutch and possibly other foreign languages. In the introduction to the memorial edition of **SETH JONES**, which was published in cloth binding in February 1901, Ellis refers to a Welsh

DIME NOVEL ROUNDUP — Vol. 54, No. 5, Whole No. 575 — October 1985
Publications No. 157140 ISSN 0012-2874

Published six times per year at 821 Vermont Street, Lawrence, Kansas 66044. Edward T. LeBlanc, editor, 87 School Street, Fall River, Mass. 02720, to whom new and renewal subscriptions, address changes and advertising should be sent. Second class postage paid at Lawrence, Kansas 66044. Subscription: \$10 per year. Ad rates: 15c per word, \$3.00 per column inch; \$6.00 per quarter page; \$8.00 per half page and \$15.00 per full page.

Postmaster: Send form 3579 to 821 Vermont St., Lawrence, Kans. 66044

edition, but no trace of such a translation has been found.

When Irwin P. Beadle parted company with his brother and entered into partnership with George Munro, Ellis supported Irwin and later George Munro also, writing many of Munro's Ten Cent Novels. When Irwin Beadle began publishing on his own once more, Ellis joined him in producing the American Novels. It has now been established that Ellis later became proprietor of the series. It was not a success, however and was sold to the parent Beadle Company in 1869.

Ellis was also contributing stories to story papers such as the New York Weekly and the Literary Album. Then in June 1869 he entered into a contract with Robert S. Davis and James Elverson under which he became virtually an employee-author for Saturday Night. That contract lasted for ten years until Davis & Elverson dissolved their partnership. During that period Ellis had also acted as editor of a Trenton newspaper for two years. When Elverson became sole owner of Saturday Night most of the better authors tried to join Robert Bonner's New York Ledger including Ellis. He was persuaded by Elverson however, to accept the editorship of a new juvenile story paper, GOLDEN DAYS. This lasted for two years when Ellis resigned the editorship because of interference in his work by James Elverson. He then helped Frank Munsey establish the Golden Argosy on which Munsey's fortune was founded. Precisely what assistance Ellis gave to Munsey is not clear but it is certain that Munsey never made any adequate acknowledgement.

From 1865 onward, Ellis was also contributing sketches and serials to the Frank Leslie publications, mostly under pen names. He also contributed serials to George Munro's story papers, New York Fireside Companion and Girls and Boys of America. In the early 1880's Ellis became primarily an author of cloth bound juvenile books, though some had been serialized earlier in story papers or newspapers. He also began to establish a reputation as a writer of non-fiction. Pen names which had been used frequently hitherto, were now discarded but a wide range of different publishers became involved.

In 1890 Ellis tried once more to make his fortune by publishing. His choice was THE BOYS' HOLIDAY, a well printed publication, a cut above many of its rivals. Ellis had no head for business however, and soon got into financial difficulties, and sold out to Woolfall Publishing Co. His desperate efforts to keep the publication going led to his selling valuable copyrights of his non-fiction works. As a result he became bankrupt in 1901.

Ellis was an extremely active man who could turn his hand to anything, for example he became the New Jersey legislative correspondent for the NEW YORK WORLD and was employed in the same capacity for the PHILADELPHIA TIMES. Evidently that experience inspired Ellis to write an exposé of New Jersey government and politics which was published in the NEWARK SUNDAY CALL—not surprisingly the review was anonymous!

Ellis had also become extremely interested in detective stories and wrote a large number, most of which were newspaper serials. P. F. Collier published a few.

In the 1890's Ellis became more and more involved with non-fiction books on such diverse subjects as the U. S.'s Indian Wars, The Boer War, school text books and biographical studies of famous Americans. He also edited Plutarch's Lives and mythological dictionaries for the young.

When Indian stories fell from favor, Ellis' income was severely reduced and we find him writing for the Maine mail order papers and even a food-store magazine. Towards the very end of his life he turned to writing motion picture scripts and was convinced that he had embarked upon a new writing career when he persuaded Thomas Edison to produce a series of films depict-

ing American history based on his (Ellis') scripts. Unfortunately for Ellis, Edison found that the educational side of film making was not profitable and he dropped the scheme. Ellis tried hard to reactivate the idea but died before he could get anywhere.

The value of Ellis and his contemporaries to the literary student stems from the fact that they lived and wrote in what was perhaps the most exciting period of development in the history of the United States. When Ellis was born, in 1840, the country was still more or less undeveloped. During his lifetime there was a flood of immigrants from Europe and a positive explosion of inventive genius from the railroad to the motion picture. The authors of the time were fortunate in that the period also initiated publishing for the masses. The publishers required their writers to produce topical stories of immediate interest. Also they did not have to face competition from 20th century technology. Consequently the modern student has a vast reservoir of popular literature on which to draw for studies of American development. In the works of Edward S. Ellis they are particularly fortunate inasmuch as he was a tremendously prolific writer. He was keenly interested in political and technological development, he could write entertainingly and his family has preserved for us valuable records from which his writings can be traced.

The quantity of Ellis' writings provides the student with one extra advantage. Much of it was reprinted, sometimes pirated, and so the student can find many examples of how editors operated, cutting original stories or adding to fill out the required number of pages, inserting irrelevant short stories and other editorial malpractices.

THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF DIME NOVEL SCHOLARSHIP

By J. Randolph Cox

1985 marks the 125th anniversary of the publication of the first Dime Novel, Mrs. Ann S. Stephens' "Malaeska, the Indian Wife of the White Hunter." In the past century and a quarter there have been hundreds of articles, books, and pamphlets discussing the Dime Novel and its place in American society. In the next few minutes I hope to touch on some of the more significant of these to indicate past trends and suggest what may be the future of Dime Novel scholarship.

Surveying this avalanche of print reveals that the Dime Novel critic began by viewing it with dispassion. Dispassion was soon replaced by Disdain, Disgust, and Despair. This in turn was succeeded by Nostalgia, followed by the facetious school of literary criticism, and since by zealous Bibliography. Attention paid to the Dime Novel was often accompanied by the recognition that it was truly American phenomenon which deserved further study.

William Everett, writing for the "North American Review" in 1864, was of the opinion that reading a Dime Novel was an up-hill struggle, but that encouraging publishers to supply good, cheap literature would do much "to form a correct public taste, and to supply with sound information a vast body of readers not likely to be reached by any other literature." A few years later, W. H. Bishop would concur that even a perverted taste for reading was better than no taste for reading at all, although he felt that the story paper literature of 1879 was inferior to the early publications of Beadle & Adams. By 1883, Anthony Comstock could proclaim that the Half-Dime Novels and Story Papers bred "vulgarity, profanity, loose ideas of life, (as well as) impurity of thought and deed," without citing any specific examples by title.

Subsequent publishers would make it clear that their products were far superior to the Dime Novels of an earlier day. They tried not to draw any comparison if at all possible.

By 1907, when the heyday of the Dime Novel was drawing toward dusk, Charles Harvey could survey the genre for the "Atlantic Monthly" and suggest that even the degeneration of the form (with the Detective replacing the Frontiersman) couldn't entirely kill it. Certain forces in the evolution of American society, especially the taming of the frontier, were clearly represented in the Dime Novel.

Something of that theme from Harvey's article has remained in the literature on the Dime Novel although a common thread of Nostalgia may also be found in the vast majority of the newspaper and magazine articles. First it was a backward glance at the reading matter of one's own boyhood such as Irvin S. Cobb's "Saturday Evening Post" article of 1920, "A Plea for Old Cap Collier," with its image of the schoolboy reading his Dime Novel hidden behind the geography or history textbook. As time passed it was no longer the stories the readers had read as boys, but the stories their FATHERS had read and then those read by their GRANDFATHERS.

Interviews with former Dime Novelists or reminiscences by them are too often fanciful and too little revealing of the truth, but generally entertaining. In 1902 there was Gelett Burgess's interview with Eugene T. Sawyer for "The Bookman," followed in 1904 by Dime Novelist George C. Jenks' guide for the writing of Dime Novels, called "Dime Novel Makers." John R. Coryell's "Reminiscences of Nick Carter by His Creator" appeared in Street & Smith's "Detective Story Magazine" in 1918. When Frederic Van Rensselaer Dey retired from writing Nick Carter in 1912 he was the subject of a number of newspaper interviews. He embellished on his own legend in an article for the "American Magazine" in 1920 when he explained "How I wrote a Thousand 'Nick Carter' Novels."

By 1920, the Dime Novel had become somewhat respectable as a Collectible and the gift to the New York Public Library of the O'Brien collection of Beadle & Adams was news. With the reissue in 1929 of a cloth-bound edition of "Malaeska" (introduced by Dr. Frank P. O'Brien) respectability was virtually assured.

The facetious school of literary criticism may have inspired James M. Cain's 1927 interview with Frank Merriwell's creator, Gilbert Patten. In "The Man Merriwell," published in the "Saturday Evening Post," readers were treated to an imaginative account of the early days of the Dime Novel which included such homely bits of information as that Col. Prentiss Ingraham (author of Buffalo Bill stories for Street & Smith) was a gentleman of the old South who "could cuss in rimed hexameter verse." The article is of particular significance as the earliest printed source for the text of the now-famous letter to Patten from Ormond G. Smith in which the plan for the Merriwell series was explained.

Two years later, Edmund Pearson published his justly famous, but facetious history, "Dime Novels; or, Following an Old Trail in Popular Literature," which has served as source material for countless subsequent studies. Based on an examination of the O'Brien Collection, a half-dozen secondary sources, and the recollections of a handful of famous men who would admit to having read Dime Novels in their youth, Pearson attempted to assess the position of the Dime Novel. The book is a delight inasmuch as it does not pretend to take itself or its subject more seriously than necessary. Subsequent scholars have taken it more seriously than did its author by overlooking such clues as the statement on page 223 that reading Deadwood Dick as a boy

may have had some significance, but what it signified the author did not know. "But (he says) it does not do to write a book, without finding something or other significant."

Among its values is the amount of space given over to liberal excerpts from classic Dime Novels, although his balance is strange. In a book of 280 pages (including index), 52 are devoted to the first Old Cap Collier novel from 1883, 5 to "Malaeska," 12 to "Seth Jones," and only 2 to Frank Merriwell. There may be a question whether to consider Merriwell a Dime Novel at all.

Gilbert Patten's articleless, "Dime Novel Days," for the *Saturday Evening Post* of 1931, don't mention Pearson at all, but he is telling his own story along with that of several of the picturesque characters who wrote for Beadle, Munro, and Stret & Smith and telling it well.

Before the academics discovered the Dime Novel as a subject fit for scholarly examination, some of the men who used to read them as boys took a long look back over their shoulders and began to exchange information in the form of reminiscences, checklists, and historical surveys in the pages of such amateur publications as the "Happy Hours Magazine," the "Novel Hunters Yearbook," and the "Dime Novel Roundup." Of these publications, the "Dime Novel Roundup," begun in 1931, is still being published.

It is difficult to overestimate the value of publications such as these to the scholarship on the Dime Novel. The scholar overlooks them at his or her peril. The student of attitudes toward Dime Novels will find grist for the intellectual mill in even a casual reading of the back files. There was a fierce loyalty to the Dime Novel during the heyday of the pulp magazines of the 1930s.

Among the most prolific contributors to the "Dime Novel Roundup" was J. Edward Leithead whose conversational articles on themes in Dime Novels brought to life the excitement that accompanied the arrival of the latest issue of a favorite series to the neighborhood newssand.

One of the curious by-products of the fan magazine movement was the facsimile reprint. Between 1945 and 1964, at least 74 Dime Novels were reproduced in facsimile (complete with lurid cover illustrations) through the efforts of Ralph F. Cummings and Charles Bragin. These publications have proved to be both a boon and a burden to the scholar and the collector. On the one hand they provided a text which would not crumble at the touch and helped preserve some scarce titles. On the other hand, uninformed as well as unscrupulous dealers have attempted to pass them off to customers as originals at highly inflated prices.

Since 1963 there have been four collections of Dime Novels issued by various publishers: "Nick Carter, Detective," an edition of "Seth Jones" bound with "Deadwood Dick on Deck," "Eight Dime Novels," and "The Dime Novel Detective." The texts in the first two were reset, those in the second two were in facsimile. Of a total of 21 texts represented, only 7 had not previously been reprinted in facsimile by Cummings and Bragin. By chance or design, the examples we have available for study have become limited to a select few based largely on access and not necessarily on historical significance. The assumption that when you've read one Dime Novel you've read them all is in danger of never being given a fair test.

The first academic to deal with the Dime Novel in any depth may well have been John Levi Cutler. His 1933 thesis, "Gilbert Patten and His Frank Merriwell Saga: A Study in Sub-literary Fiction, 1896-1913," was published by the University of Maine in 1934. By his own admission, he leaned heavily

on Pearson for his survey of the Dime Novel before Patten and he continued the tradition of viewing with disdain when he compared the Dime Novel to a fungus on the land. The rest of his study was based on a reading of the Merriwell stories as well as interviews and correspondence with Patten himself. This is also the publication which includes a reproduction of a Frank Merriwell cover (from the "Tip Top Weekly") which did not really appear on a Frank Merriwell book.

One of the most frequently cited articles on Dime Novels has been Merle Curti's "Dime Novels and the American Tradition," published in the "Yale Review" in 1937. His argument for the Dime Novel as a source for a better understanding of those themes and attitudes which make up the American character has been warmly applauded, but too seldom followed. Henry Nash Smith's "Virgin Land: The American West as a Symbol and Myth" (1950) is, of course, the classic example of the application of this thesis. Philip Durham, as late as 1966, was still regretting that more scholars had not taken up the challenges of Curti's article in the intervening years. In spite of a few notable exceptions, Durham's gloomy assessment still holds true today. The promise is there; the fulfillment has yet to be realized.

The most monumental aid to that realization is Albert Johannsen's "The House of Beadle & Adams and Its Dime and Nickel Novels: The Story of a Vanished Literature." The first two volumes were published in 1950 with a supplementary third volume of addenda and corrigenda in 1962. Compiled by a Collector with the Patience and Critical Eye of a Scholar, it is a model for all subsequent work. It is difficult to praise it highly enough. From the history of the publisher to the bibliographical listings and the biographies of the writers, there is little which the author appears to have overlooked.

The book may have served as a catalyst for a number of worthwhile publications soon followed from other writers. Reviews of the book brought out the expected Sunday Supplement overviews to rehash the old news about what Grandfather read as a boy—Pearson strained through a fresh cheese-cloth. Among the exceptions was Mary Noel's survey for the "American Heritage," which, in spite of a lack of documentation seemed fresh and interesting. Her 1954 book on story papers, "Villains Galore" was equally fresh and interesting although it, too, was surprisingly lacking in documentation. This documentation, which had been present in her work in its original form as a doctoral dissertation, had been removed when it was published in book form. Occasionally, this led in the book to an unfortunate vagueness about the date of publication of specific stories under discussion.

While no one could level a charge of "sparse documentation" at Jay Monaghan's biography of Ned Buntline, "The Great Rascal" (1952), there is an aura of the facetious about parts of it. When the aged author turned temperance lecturer stops in the saloon for a quiet drink after signing the pledge, one feels that this may have been included because it was too good a story to be left out.

Several biographers of Western frontier characters have paid attention to the Dime Novels about their subjects and examined the influence of these on the popular conceptions of their subjects' exploits. No biography of Buffalo Bill can avoid the Dime Novel aspect of his career and Don Russell's "The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill" (1960) may well be the definitive study in this aspect as in others. "The Western Hero in History and Legend" (1965) uses the Dime Novels about Kit Carson, Wild Bill Hickok, Billy the Kid and General Custer as source material, while William A. Settle, Jr.'s "Jesse James Was His Name" examines the Dime Novels about the Missouri outlaw. Daryl E. Jones' "The Dime Novel Western" (1978) tried to cover

the whole scope of the Dime Novel portrayal of frontier figures.

The Dime Novel continues to serve as source material for the authors of journal articles and recent examples have focused on themes of nationalism, stories set in Chicago, the Mexican stereotype found in Ned Buntline, and the surprisingly ambiguous view of the American Indian, albeit a stereotype, which one encounters.

Two very recent studies indicate that the possibilities for the Dime Novel as resource have not been entirely exhausted. Robert Sampson's study of series characters in the pulp magazines, "Yesterday's Faces" traces their origin to characters found in the Dime Novels, especially the Nick Carter character. And one of the most unique departures from well-worn tradition may be Thomas L. Kent's experimental application of Vladimir Propp's functions for the folktale to the Dime Novel in his 1982 article in "The Journal of Popular Culture," "The Formal Conventions of the Dime Novel." His choice of texts, "Seth Jones" and "Deadwood Dick on Deck," are also two of the more readily accessible texts (they have appeared in both facsimile and reset editions in recent years), but he claims that he knows of more than 200 other titles to which the formula could be applied as well. It will be interesting to apply this method to some of the later examples from the 1890s ("Nick Carter and the Green Goods Men" or "Frank Merriwell at Yale," perhaps) to test its universality.

We promised a look into the future of Dime Novel Research and are prepared to dust off our crystal ball for that purpose at this time. Certainly we will see additional articles and books along the lines of past themes and these will be welcome. It seems to me that there are at least three areas of concern which demand the greatest attention. One is accessible texts with which to work and a knowledge of where the major collections may be found. The fragile nature of the materials is another textual concern. Except for the earliest publications, none of them was printed on paper designed to withstand heavy use or the passage of time. You rise from the work table amid a shower of fine, brown flakes. One solution is, of course, microfilm, and the filming of the Beadle & Adams collection at the University of Minnesota by University Microfilm was certainly a major undertaking and a welcome project. We need more projects like that and the selective filming of Street & Smith publications (between 1876 and 1900 which was mentioned by Dr. Hoyle in her paper on the Hess Collection is an excellent example. We need to be in a position to suggest and support more of these. We also need to know about similar projects which may be in the works so that there is no unnecessary duplication of effort. If there were some kind of informal information network between institutions with major collections in Dime Novels and related materials this could facilitate some of this.

In the past there have been attempts to actually republish key series of Dime Novels in facsimile. "The Frank Reade Library" in 10 volumes was one of these. It appears to be in limbo at present, but one can only hope that funds and sufficient interest as well as the material to reproduce can make a project like this possible.

We still need Bibliographies of Dime Novel series, along the lines of those in Johannsen. A number of these have already appeared as Supplements to the "Dime Novel Roundup" and additional ones are in the works. So far this appears to be our best source of information. It has been something of a "cottage industry" to date and a good deal of it has been due to the efforts of Edward LeBlanc, the editor of the "Dime Novel Roundup." Beadle & Adams has been covered adequately, Street & Smith should perhaps be the next publisher on which to focus our attention. While not complete, there is a Street

& Smith Archives in the George Arents Research Library at Syracuse University, and this will assist us greatly in assigning authorship and verifying publishing patterns. There are three other major publishers (George Munro, Norman L. Munro, and Frank Tousey) and several minor publishers who should then be covered in the same manner. It is a large task, but by breaking the work down by publisher and series, it may be possible to make some progress.

The third area of major concern are histories of the major publishers and biographies of individuals (publishers and writers). Here we may be too late with too little to work on. The people who could have told us what we wanted to know are no longer alive and there are few archives to which we can turn. We need a better history of Street & Smith than the centennial history that Quentin Reynolds wrote in 1955, "The Fiction Factory." We need a good, sound, accurate, reliable history of the entire Dime Novel field. We need some sort of basic Reference Work, a kind of "Oxford Companion to Dime Novels and Story Papers" to which we can turn for basics. Short entries: authors, pseudonyms, characters, the beginning and closing dates for a series (and how many numbers there were). Researchers should not be confused over the difference between Deadwood Dick and Diamond Dick, Old King Brady and Young King Brady, whether an issue of "Secret Service" contains the first appearance of a story or a reprint. Much of this information exists in capsule form already, but it is badly scattered.

If we could accomplish all of this (or even some of it) more scholars might be drawn to the Dime Novel as a viable source for research. American Studies programs need to be encouraged to encourage their students to explore this field. Some do this already, especially at institutions whose libraries have substantial collections to support such research.

There is a lot to do. Some of it is as basic as a good bibliography of the Frank Merriwell stories. We have had enough Sunday Supplement overviews of Merriwell, based on secondary sources; we have had too few serious attempts to examine the stories as reflections of American interest in sports or even of the American character. The 1937 challenge of Merle Curti is still there. Someone needs to answer it.

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BOOK REVIEW

THE LOST LIFE OF HORATIO ALGER, JR.

By Gary Scharnhorst with Jack Balese

Indiana University Press. 199 pp. \$17.95

This book is a "must," of course, for any serious student of Alger's life and times. It takes the really excellent research of Jack Bales and Gary Schornhorst and ties it into a most readable and quite accurate story. The book should probably be discussed in three parts, "setting the record straight," the actual life of Alger and myths after Alger.

Starting with the actual life of Alger, the authors have come up with a well written and detailed biography. The research is meticulous and the statements are well footnoted. Much of the material has been accumulated over a period of years and has had the advantage of being examined, questioned and authenticated by other Alger scholars. A major advantage to the authors was the knowledge that practically everything previously written about Alger's life, other than primary sources, was based on spurious information. The section on the life of Alger is well organized and probably as complete in major areas as can be expected. The continuity and balance, to my mind, are excellent. The section on Alger's pedophilia is handled with taste and serves as an enlightening introduction to Alger's later life. The incident is apparently responsible for Alger's puzzling aversion to publicity and possibly responsible for the paucity of basic material on his life. The readers of this review are too familiar with Alger to need any recapitulation of the facts of his life. Essentially it seems to have been a dull life and from reading the history of the man it is difficult to see why he has become such a part of the American social myth.

There are, however, certain questions about stated facts in the life of Alger, particularly in the statements about the Alger-Stratemeyer relationship. Scharnhorst notes (p. 144) "In November 1896, during his last trip to New York he had called on Stratemeyer and found him both polite and personable. When he decided to recruit a ghost to round out his manuscript, he thought first of Stratemeyer, who had completed William T. Adams' last manuscript a few years ago. On October 26, 1898, Alger wrote to solicit the help of the younger writer." Adams actually did not die until 1897 and Adams' book "An Undivided Union," completed by Stratemeyer, was not copyrighted until 1899. It is true, as the authors note, that Stratemeyer re-printed "Young Acrobat" but this is hardly a basis for "soliciting the help of the younger writer." "Young Acrobat" was published in Stratemeyer's "Bright Days" from 9-5-1896 to 12-12-1896, not for two years as stated by the authors. Included with the title in each issue of "Bright Days" was the statement "Copyrighted by the United States Book Co. Published with Permission of the American Publishers' Corporation." I rather suspect that Stratemeyer's earlier contacts with Alger, when Stratemeyer was a writer and editor at Street and Smith, were responsible for the communication. As Scharnhorst notes, Alger had

corresponded with Stratemeyer "for over two years" but I believe the two writers were acquainted for several years before the correspondence. Scharnhorst says also, "over the next decade, he (Stratemeyer) would complete eight more novels published under Alger's notebooks and other material which Augusta sent him." There is no question about the cooperation between Augusta Alger and Stratemeyer or the fact that the Alger-Stratemeyer had a basis of Alger material but exactly how it was a "genuine collaboration" is not documented. These are minor points but they do raise a concern about the accuracy of other statements. The Adams-Alcott (and Alger) controversy with the librarians and "custodians of culture" of the 1870's does not seem to me to be as accurate and balanced as it might be. These concerns may be matters of individual interpretation. The details of the book, in general, are so impressively documented that perhaps my comments are sheer carping.

The section "myths after Alger" or the impact and ultimate effect of Alger on American culture is brief since this is not the purpose of the book. In "Afterward" the authors examine the question "How did he (Alger) acquire renown as a success idealogue," and present a thoughtful and convincing analysis of the reasons. An interesting point is presented that in the myriad reprints of Alger's works in the early 1900's, many of the books were abridged to suit modern tastes and many of the earlier books, which did not conform as well to the perceived interest of the times were not reprinted. The authors also noted that in the 1930's such papers as the "New York Times," "Herald Tribune" and "Christian Science Monitor" acclaimed the "Alger pattern" and Alger's philosophy of self-help. This trend has continued although warped more and more by prevailing attitudes. "No longer perceived as merely moral fables, Alger's novels seemed more like tools of social control wielded by an entrenched ruling class." "Alger himself hardly could have imagined that he would be long remembered, much less celebrated as an American mythologizer a half-century after his death." To this reviewer "Afterward" is the most perceptive and socially significant portion of the book even though it is somewhat incidental to Alger's life.

The section on "setting the record straight" raises a number of concerns. According to the dedication, Herbert R. Mayes "urged us to set the record straight." Mayes' 1927 book on Alger is claimed to be a parody on Alger which got out of hand. Whether or not a parody was the intention it certainly got out of hand and stayed out of hand. Mark Van Doren, Malcolm Cowley, Harry Hansen and Allan Nevins, the Dictionary of American Biography and the Britannica all accepted the book as gospel. Even in 1958 Mayes insisted on the accuracy of his excerpts from Alger's non-existent diaries. If this was intended as a spoof in the beginning—and the evidence seems quite inconclusive to me—it is difficult to accept the rationale for continuing the spoof, particularly when it became obvious that here was a real resurgence in interest in Alger and serious researchers were leaning heavily on these well-accepted lies for a good part of their background material. But Mayes did not admit the hoax until long after the other biographies were published. This book whitewashes Mayes for trying to set the record straight and is quite harsh with Gruber ("a writer of B-western screenplays and pulp detective fiction,") Tebbel, (. . . transparently derivative from the pen of a biographer with scholarly credentials,") Gardner, ("inexperienced as a researcher and untrained as a historian—Gardner owned a small advertising agency. . ."), and Hoyt ("Hoyt's biography is in fact a collection of misinformation.") This kind of calumny seems to be unfair, most partisan and quite unnecessary. Scharnhorst and Bales knew the Mayes biography by his own admission was almost

entirely fabricated. The other biographers (and distinguished critics through the years) did not. Scharnhorst and Bales's research and writing is excellent. There was no need to castigate other biographers as they did. It will certainly not smooth over the existing rifts in the Alger field.

As I noted in the beginning, this book sheds important new light on the life of Alger, has an excellent section on myths after Alger and is a splendid addition to basic material in the field of popular childrens' literature. It is regrettable that the book is tarnished with unnecessary aspersions on other writers in the field.

Reviewed by John T. Dizer, Jr., Ph.D., P.E.
Professor and Dean Emeritus
Mohawk Valley Community College
Utica, NY 13501

LETTERS

Editor:

I have read Jack Dizer's review of "The Lost Life of Horatio Alger, Jr." with surprise and amusement. It is woefully apparent Dizer has never attempted to write a biography. I am aghast that he would suppose it a "major advantage" that Jack Bales and I knew "that practically everything previously written about Alger's life, other than primary sources, was based on spurious information." Utter nonsense. Jack and I spent years tracking down sources which never existed or, worse yet, we had to locate reliable primary sources which would contradict the outright lies fabricated by earlier biographers. The book could have been written in one-third the time it took had we not suffered the peculiar misfortune of separating wheat from the chaff of Mayes, Gruber, Tebbel, Gardner, and Hoyt. Dizer seems to think Herb Mayes the main culprit in this sad tale. Trust me, Jack, or read the book more closely than you did the first time: Mayes was NOT the only biographer to invent bucketfuls of lies to fill the void of ignorance. None of Alger's previous biographers did their homework, else their books would not be rotten with mistakes.

Dizer raises two other issues which I would lay to rest. He is troubled by apparent errors in our account of the Alger-Stratemeyer relationship. (I confess upon rereading this section of the biography I discovered an editorial mistake. Our statement that "Young Acrobat" was serialized in "Bright Days" "for over two years" should have read "over two years before." Just for the record, there is also a typographical error on page 39 that Gil Westgard calls to the attention of readers of "Newsboy.") In particular, Dizer wonders when the two writers became acquainted. He SPECULATES (and I emphasize the word) that they met in the early 1890s when Stratemeyer worked for Street and Smith. In the first place, Jack and I nowhere suggest in the biography that the two men were NOT acquainted in the early 1890s. There is simply no evidence to support this claim. Alger first mentions Stratemeyer in his extant correspondence on September 25, 1896, early on in the serialization of "Young Acrobat." His earliest extant letter to Stratemeyer, in reply to a letter from the younger writer, is dated Feb. 3, 1897, and begins: "I am glad to have tidings of you." While the formality of this salutation disproves nothing, it illustrates how cautious biographers must be about disguising sheer guesswork as fact. Dizer's suspicion that "the two writers were acquainted for several years before the correspondence" merely echoes Gardner's utterly unfounded speculations. Indeed, I defy Dizer or Gardner to offer an ounce of evidence to support this whimsy. The earliest recorded

contact between the men occurred a few days after the serialization of Alger's story had concluded in the paper Stratemeyer edited. Finally, Dizer complains that he cannot understand how the eight novels Stratemeyer completed from Alger's notes after Alger's death represent a "genuine collaboration." I fail to understand his confusion. Were the novels the joint products of their pens? Obviously. Stratemeyer fleshed out notes left by Alger. Enough said.

A final point: Dizer accuses us of partisanship. In his view, our book "whitewashes Mayes" and disparages all other biographers. I beg to differ. Our book disparages all biographers, including Mayes. It is true that Mayes encouraged us to set the record straight, and for his support Jack and I dedicate the biography to him. But we hardly soft-peddle our (or his, for that matter) disdain for his work. Mayes also urged us to set the record straight about his work and I am dumbfounded that any reader could miss our criticisms. We refer to Mayes' work as "an exercise in histrionics" (p. xi). We observe that "no American writer" except perhaps Edgar Allan Poe "had been so misrepresented by a biographer" before Mayes' "Alger" (p. xiii). We refer to his "brazen" bluffs and "cheeky" attempts to conceal the truth in the 1940s and 1950s (p. xiii). We quote Malcolm Cowley, who refers to Mayes' "barefaced lies" (p. xiii), and even Mayes himself, who describes his own work as a "miserable, maudlin piece of claptrap" (p. xi). It is to Mayes' credit that he has admitted the truth, which is more than Alger's other biographers have done to date.

Dizer worries that our book will fail to "smooth over the existing rifts in the Alger field." Our book was no more designed to smooth over "rifts in the Alger field" (whatever that is) than was Dizer's review. We merely tried to report the truth about Alger and Alger's biographers as fully and as accurately as possible. And so far we have been rewarded with unanimously favorable reviews in such high-circulation publications as the "Boston Globe" and "Dallas Morning News." Jonathan Yardley, a Pulitzer Prize winning columnist, averred in the "Washington Post" for June 5, 1985, that our book "is a nice piece of scholarship, done against considerable odds and done very well." Rest assured, one review like Yardley's is enough to compensate me for fifty like Dizer's.

Gary Scharnhorst, Ph.D.

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University of Texas at Dallas
and Fulbright Gasteprofessor in Amerikanistik
Universitat Heidelberg

Dear Eddie:

The latest issue of Round-Up was one of the best; even though it brought the sad news of Denis Rogers' demise. He sure was a dedicated man in his search for Ellis material. He stayed at my home two days while he researched my files of old story papers, and he gathered much information from them. I remember with pleasure, a little later, you and Rogers visited me, and we all went on an Ellis book search through many antique stores and barns on Route 28. up into N.H. We found some, too. He was a fine gentleman.

The article by Lydia Godfrey was very interesting, and brought a lot of memories back to mind; of the days when Ornum and Munro puzzled us new dime novel collectors. Some things still puzzle me. I have a Black Highwayman novel (#20). Norman L. Munro, Beekman St. on all the ads; but

other Black Highwayman novels have that address on some, and in one instance in one book Norman L. Munro lists Beekman St., 163 William St.; and Ornum & Co., Beekman St., and P. O. Box 3643—all four addresses in one book (#26). My copy of #20 has some dark stains through a dozen pages where someone apparently pressed a flower and the stain spread. I paid \$5.00 for this, but feel it was about a third of the value of a good copy.

Another curious fact about the Munros: In Volume 3 of Mott's History of American Magazines, he states that (among other statistics) George Munro's Fireside Companion was #1 in the weekly story paper field, surpassing Street & Smith's New York Weekly and all the others. He also states that he was the originator of Old Sleuth, and Old Cap. Collier. And strangely, he makes no mention whatsoever of Norman Munro's Family Story Paper which was also popular in that era. This is a peculiar oversight in such a comprehensive work as "Mott."

The Stratemeyer cryptogram solved by Bleiler was of great interest to me. To think that has been around all these years and just came to light. I looked it up in my Brave and Bold, and it is a wonder nobody ever caught this evidence before; that proves who the author was.

Pachon and Chenu had interesting articles, too. A nice issue.

Ralph P. Smith

Dear Eddie:

I have the August Roundup with the shocking news of Denis Rogers' death. I know you and he must have been very close friends and that you will miss him as a person very much indeed.

While I had never met Denis, I have enjoyed the many contributions he made to the Roundup and learned to respect and admire his serious research and dedication to each job he worked on. I hope his Ellis bibliography can be completed and published.

Sincerely, Capt. Frank C. Acker, USN (Ret.)

Dear Eddie:

Paul and I were so sorry to read of Denis Rogers passing. He seemed to be a real gentleman as well as a dedicated bibliographer. We hope that his work will be completed at Minnesota and the Ellis bibliography will soon see the light of day. We need more enthusiastic individuals like Rogers who are willing to immerse themselves in the intricacies of their subject.

J. B. Dobkin, Univ. of South Florida

NEWS NOTES

Joseph A. Ruttar of 3116 Teesdale St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19152 has written and published a book titled "Perry Lane and the Secret of the Pyramid." This is a Jerry Todd type story written in the 1920's style of Leo Edwards. It is recommended by collectors including myself. The price is \$17.14 including postage. It is bound in deluxe cloth.

Dr. Fred L. King, Samaritan Memorial Hospital, Macon, Mo. 63552 has published a Jack Armstrong Encyclopedia which I found to be excellent. It contains a short synopsis of the early programs and the titles of all the programs through 1951. Jack Armstrong was one of my favorite radio programs during my early teen years and I found Dr. King's book excellent. Price is \$12.00 postpaid.

The Yellowback Library continues with its excellent issues. The latest, No. 29 Sept./Oct. 1985 has excellent articles on Bert Salg, by Willis J. Pott-hoff, The Poppy Ott Series, by Bob Chenu. If you are not a subscriber, send \$2.00 to Gil O'Gara, 811 Boulder Ave., Des Moines, Iowa 50315.

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(Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

Date of filing: Oct. 8, 1985

Title of publication: Dime Novel Roundup

Publication No.: 157140

Frequency of issue: 6 times per year.

No. of issues published annually: 6

Annual Subscription Price \$10

Location of known office of publication: 821 Vermont St., Lawrence, Kansas 66044

Location of the Headquarters or general business offices of the publishers:

87 School St., Fall River, Mass. 02720

Publisher: Edward T. LeBlanc, 87 School St., Fall River, Mass. 02720

Editor: Edward T. LeBlanc, 87 School St., Fall River, Mass. 02720

Owner: Edward T. LeBlanc, 87 School St., Fall River, Mass. 02720

Known bondholders, etc: None

Extent and nature of circulation	Actual no.	
	Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months	copies of single issue pub. nearest to filing date
Total no. copies	560	550
Sales through dealers, carriers, vendors, etc.	0	0
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Total paid subscriptions	409	366
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Returns from news agents	0	0
Total	560	550

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